



Maricopa County Animal Care & Control



Desert Full Of Danger

An Ounce Of Prevention

The Arizona desert has more varieties of animal life than any other desert on the earth. You should seek to understand and respect all of these creatures, and sometimes this includes giving them a wide berth or practicing a little common sense so they do not injure you or your pets. Although fatalities among humans due to snake bite and other exposures are very low, pets may not be so fortunate. Here are some tips on how to keep your cat and dog safe:

- **Leave wild animals alone.** This may be obvious advice to most people, but pets - especially dogs - may not see it this way. Be conscious of the hours when snakes and other dangerous animals may be active; and never allow your dog to run free in the desert!
- **Keep your pets indoors at night.** Many dangerous creatures, especially coyotes, are nocturnal and will actively seek out dogs and cats as food sources.
- **Make your home and yard uninviting to dangerous animals** by destroying webs, providing adequate fencing, having regular inspections by pest control companies, securing trash can lids, limiting the availability of nooks and crannies such as are found in woodpiles, etc.

For more information on animal care, behavior or AC&C programs contact (602) 506-PETS or visit pets.maricopa.gov



Desert Full Of Danger

Safety & Sense

Tips on keeping your pets happy & healthy!

- **Sonoran Toads (a.k.a.: Colorado River Toads):** These amphibians can present a real threat to dogs because of their poisonous skin. If swallowed, the result is fatal. It is unlikely, however, that your dog will encounter these animals during most of the year. The toad evades drought by remaining underground, resurfacing briefly during the monsoon season (July through September) in order to breed. Dogs who wander in a toad inhabited area such as a riverbed can often get into trouble.
- **Coyotes:** These native dogs are very intelligent, wily, and will often wander far into the city along washes and alleys in search of food. They are usually more than a fair match for the average dog or cat and account for many pet "disappearances". Coyotes like to roam at night, so dogs and cats should be brought inside during the twilight and nighttime hours, especially if you live in a semi-rural area or near a large stretch of open desert.
- **Owls (Great Horned and Screech):** These meat-eating birds can pose a real threat to house cats and small dogs who are allowed to roam outside. Both owls are large, powerful birds capable of swooping down and carrying away small house pets.
- **Black Widow / Brown Recluse Spiders:** Of these two spiders, the Brown Recluse poses a greater threat to dogs and cats. The tissue around the bitten area will die and rot, causing a serious infection. The Black Widow is more common but less dangerous. It will usually build its messy web in dark, cool areas. Both spiders are easily avoided by checking regularly for and destroying any webs.
- **Rattlesnakes:** Dogs are particularly prone to finding and antagonizing rattlesnakes. Usually the result is a bite to the nose or muzzle area. Rattlesnake fangs are hollow and capable of pumping out large amounts of venom in the manner of a hypodermic needle. A tetanus infection may also result. Rattlesnakes do not attack dogs, but they will defend themselves, so it is always a good idea to leash your dog if out in the desert. Rattlesnakes are most likely encountered during the morning and late afternoon hours.
- **Coral Snakes:** These small, shy reptiles are rarely encountered but are nonetheless dangerous. They are easily identified by the colorful bands of black, yellow and red which encircle their bodies. Because their mouths are small and their fangs immobile, it is unlikely they will be able to successfully bite a pet, especially through fur. Regardless, immediate veterinary help should be sought.
- **Gila Monsters:** This reptile and its relative, the Mexican beaded lizard, are the only known venomous lizards in the world. Gila Monsters are exceptionally rare, spending the majority of the year underground. When they do emerge to hunt or mate, they can be an irresistible temptation for dogs. The Gila Monster has a locking jaw which can allow them to hold onto a victim while pumping in massive amounts of venom. The jaws may have to be pried loose or the lizard submerged in water to release its bite. Gila Monsters are protected by state law and should be given plenty of space if encountered.
- **Scorpions / Centipedes:** These venomous creatures will emerge at night from beneath rocks, woodpiles or other sheltered areas, to hunt insects. As with almost all the animals listed here, scorpions and centipedes would prefer to flee rather than fight. Dogs and cats can be persistent, however, and this is usually what leads to a bite or sting. The sting of the small Bark Scorpion is the most serious. You can help your pet avoid these insects by keeping them inside at night or calling an exterminator if you think your house may be infested.
- **Africanized "Killer" Bees:** There have been several incidents of dogs being killed by these insects since they arrived in Arizona in the early - 1990's. Although they are no more venomous than native bee varieties, they are easily angered and will attack en masse, delivering numerous stings in just a matter of seconds. If your home is infested, call a professional exterminator or the fire department immediately and keep pets and children away. When walking your dog, wear light-colored clothing and keep your eyes and ears open.